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ABSTRACT

The guidelines for vocational assessment of handicapped students are intended to help Texas educators fulfill requirements that a vocational assessment be completed before a handicapped student is placed in a vocational education program. Three levels of assessment data are distinguished: Level I data which are collected by special education teachers within the local school district; Level II data which are collected by special education support staff members in the local district or special education cooperative; and Level III data collected (when necessary) by specially trained persons in the local school district, special education cooperative, or region. Vocational alternatives for handicapped students are seen to include regular vocational classes, regular vocational classes with support, coordinated vocational/academic education, special vocational education classes for the handicapped, and a vocational adjustment class. A flow chart of a comprehensive vocational education program for handicapped students is given. The role of the admission, review, and dismissal committee in the vocational planning process is briefly considered. A glossary of 17 terms such as career education, least restrictive environment, and prevocational instruction is also included. (DB)

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Guidelines for Vocational Assessment Of the Handicapped

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Foreword

The Texas Education Agency is committed to comprehensive vocational education for handicapped students. The Departments of Occupational Education and Technology and Special Education are jointly assisting school districts in developing better programs at the secondary level for handicapped students.

When school personnel are provided vocational assessment data, they will be able to assist handicapped students in making appropriate vocational education choices. This document is designed to assist school district personnel in developing an assessment process for handicapped vocational students. It will assist school district personnel in identifying minimum standards for vocational assessment for mildly handicapped students as well as severely handicapped students.

Vocational assessment data can be used by school district personnel to assist the student in making a career choice. It will give school personnel guidance in placing handicapped students into appropriate vocational programs in the least restrictive environment. The skills gained by handicapped students in vocational classes will better prepare them to be productive members of society.

These guidelines will assist schools in providing vocational training which will help students to achieve the goal of economic and occupational competence as set by the State Board of Education.

Alton O. Bowen
Commissioner of Education

Introduction

There are three components in a comprehensive program of vocational education for handicapped students:

- pre-vocational training
- vocational assessment
- vocational training

The first two are critical for the successful placement of students in vocational training programs. In occupational orientation and in pre-vocational training, students learn about the many types of careers available, have hands-on exploration in some careers, and learn employability skills. Vocational guidance for handicapped students should be ongoing, with periodic checks on pre-vocational competencies.

A vocational assessment provides information that is essential in planning appropriate vocational training for handicapped students. Assessment includes the collection of information concerning a student's interest and abilities. It involves gathering information that should already be in the student's file, and additional assessment data pertinent to vocational education. This information helps to determine the work environment best suited for the individual.

Information gained from informal and formal assessment activities will be used by school personnel to assist students in making appropriate career choices and to aid them in planning for vocational training.

The Texas Education Agency publication, *Policies and Administrative Procedures for the Education of Handicapped Students,* states that vocational assessment must be conducted prior to placing handicapped students in vocational education.

The policies and procedures state:

> When considering individual education plan development for handicapped students, where vocational education subjects or courses are being considered, the following must be documented:
>
> (i) A vocational education assessment has been completed
>
> (ii) The vocational teacher who will instruct the student, the vocational administrator or instructional officer supervising vocational programs or his/her designee, and a counselor are included on the admission, review, and dismissal committee.

The Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee will use data from the vocational assessment to determine whether the student should be placed in a regular vocational program (with or without support), a separate program (CVAE or VEH), a vocational adjustment class, on-campus training, or other alternatives.

The Assessment Process

Texas Education Agency policies require that a vocational assessment be completed before a handicapped student is placed in a vocational education program. The decisions about when assessments should take place and which handicapped students should be assessed are dependent on three criteria:

First. Career education/occupational orientation and pre-vocational training programs should assist both students and teachers in identifying the students' interests and aptitudes in vocational education. This will help to determine which students may be in need of vocational education and which areas should be explored more thoroughly.

Second. Students should begin vocational education at different ages, depending on their job readiness. A vocational assessment should take place at least one year prior to the year the student becomes age-eligible for entry into a vocational education program. During the annual ARD review prior to the beginning of the vocational assessment process, appropriate planning for initiating the process should be considered by the ARD committee. Written notice of the planned vocational assessment will be provided the parent (or the student when 18 years of age).

Third. While vocational assessment is required for all secondary age handicapped students, additional special considerations may be necessary for assessing the more severely handicapped.

Assessment is the collection of data which are used to make decisions. The vocational assessment process is organized according to the decisions that must be made based on the data collected. There are three basic decisions which must be made for all students being considered for vocational education:

- Should this student be placed in vocational education?
- In what area of vocational education should this student be placed?
- In what level of training within the chosen area of vocational education should this student be placed?

Data to answer those questions for most handicapped students being considered for vocational education can be collected by persons within the local district or special education cooperative. The first two levels of an assessment must occur for each handicapped student. Following assessment, decisions can be made about program placement for vocational training. Following are the three levels:

Level I assessment data can be collected by special education teachers within the local school district.

Level II assessment data can be collected by special education support staff members available in the local district or special education cooperative. When Level II assessment is complete, the diagnostician and vocational counselor should review data and make recommendation to the ARD committee who must decide if sufficient data are available to make a vocational placement. If insufficient data are available, a Level III assessment is recommended.

Level III assessment data can be collected by specially trained persons in the local school district, special education cooperative, or region. Level III assessment is optional, based upon the ARD committee's ability to utilize information from Level I and Level II assessment.

Level I Vocational Assessment

The minimum Level I vocational assessment for handicapped students consists of six kinds of data. The local school district should appoint a special education teacher responsible for the collection of this information. This person should have some knowledge of the world of work and the needs of handicapped students. Following are the six types of data to be collected:

1. *Special education data.* A handicapped student being considered for special education services must have received a comprehensive assessment through the special education child-centered process to determine the student's eligibility and needs for special education services. This assessment should support the development of an individual education plan (IEP) for each student and assist the ARD committee in its decision. The ARD committee is a placement committee required for decision-making for every handicapped student.

Special education assessment data are generally found in the student eligibility folder. The data to be reviewed include:

- assessments of language, physical, sociological, emotional/behavioral, and intellectual factors, including an assessment of adaptive behavior.
- assessments of the student's academic, developmental, and/or behavioral performance.
- assessments of the student's specific competencies in areas of educational needs and competencies related to vocational education-where appropriate.

2. *Informal interview with the student.* The student is interviewed to determine his or her interest in vocational education and social competence or adaptive behavior related to performance in vocational education. The school district may develop or use a structured interview form for this process. A teacher or counselor who has good rapport with the student may conduct this part of the assessment.

3. *Informal conference or interview with the student's parent/s (if student is under 18.)* This conference is held at the time the ARD committee meets for annual review and recommendation for vocational assessment. The parent/s must be interviewed to determine their career expectations for the student and to discuss their perceptions of the student's social competence or adaptive behavior as it is related to performance in vocational education. Any local school district staff member who has a good rapport with parents and who has basic skills in interviewing may conduct this part of the assessment. This interview may be conducted in coordination with the ARD committee meeting, by telephone, or by personal contact.

4. *Information from the teacher who provided pre-vocational training to the student.* The teacher must provide information regarding the student's work habits and attitudes toward vocational education and general ability and aptitudes related to vocational eduction. This information can be collected via a questionnaire or may be collected during an interview conducted by local school district personnel.

5. *Aptitude, achievement, ability information.* Minimum requirements in a Level I assessment of student aptitude, achievement, and ability are to review and interpret existing special education data. Based on the available data, a decision is made regarding the need for additional assessment in the areas of aptitude, achievement, and ability.

6. *Cumulative records.* The following types of information from cumulative records should be collected for use in decision-making: grades, group achievement of IQ test data if available, attendance, discipline records.

Level II Vocational Assessment

The minimum information required in Level II vocational assessment for handicapped students consists of two kinds of data: a vocational interest inventory and a vocational aptitude test.

In general, it is assumed that support staff members such as counselors, educational diagnosticians, or school psychologists from the regular, vocational, or special education programs will be responsible for collecting these kinds of data. However, if appropriate inservice training in the administration and interpretation of these standardized instruments is offered to teachers or other professionals, those persons also may conduct Level II assessments.

The persons assigned responsibility for collecting Level II assessment data may decide to use work samples to assess some students. Work samples are tasks or activities that simulate a specific job and are used to assess skills, aptitudes, and abilities similar to those required in competitive employment situations. Work samples can be developed at the local level to simulate jobs available in the community.

The local district has the option of using exploratory vocational experiences as part of Level II assessment. When other parts of Levels I and II have been completed, a counselor may assist the student in the selection of "trial areas" in vocational classes. The student may participate in any available vocational course on a short-term trial basis. A professional or paraprofessional familiar with the job cluster being taught must accompany the student, or he/she can be placed in a small group for instruction. The length of exploratory time needed will depend on the individual student's needs and capabilities but may not exceed 30 days.

When Level II data collection has been completed, the diagnostician and counselor should review the data and recommend to the ARD committee vocational placement or additional assessment for each student.

Level III Vocational Assessment

When the ARD committee is able to determine an appropriate vocational option based on Levels I and II, Level III assessment may be unnecessary. Those students recommended for a more comprehensive vocational assessment will be assessed by Level III processes. Level III vocational assessment data must be collected by persons who have received specific training in both vocational assessment and assessment of handicapped persons. Such testing usually requires special equipment and resources. Special consideration should be given to the severely handicapped students to ensure collection of sufficient data for decision making. The trained personnel and special equipment may be located within the local district or special education cooperative, or they may be provided on a regional basis through the education service center, Mental Health-Mental Retardation, Texas Rehabilitation Commission, a multi-district cooperative, or private evaluation centers. Level III assessment is an optional comprehensive work evaluation which may include any or all of the following components:

- review and/or update of medical, psychological, educational, and social information data
- use of vocational instruments to assess more formally
- work samples—either commercially developed or locally developed
- exploratory vocational course tryouts
- observation of work behavior

In addition to the comprehensive work evaluation, unique specialized data may be necessary for students with particular handicapping conditions. For emotionally disturbed students, psychological or psychiatric recommendations may assist personnel in developing social skills training, behavior management techniques, and curriculum adaptation. Other specially trained persons may need to assist teachers in developing appropriate adaptations for students with physical handicaps, visual handicaps, and auditory handicaps.

Use of Assessment Data

A written report of the vocational assessment data must be prepared. It addresses all of the minimum components of Levels I and II and the optional components of Level III if assessment was done at that level. For each area addressed, the report should specify who did the assessment, when it was done, where it was done, procedures used in the assessment, results of the assessment, and interpretations. Each local district should assign at least one person responsibility for compiling the written report to assist the ARD committee in its decisions.

When the ARD committee has agreed on the student's present competencies with regard to potential vocational training, the committee should develop annual goals and short-term instructional objectives through which the student's progress in vocational education can be measured. Annual goals will primarily address the program areas of vocational education in which the student is expected to make progress, while the short-term objectives will address the specific levels of training which the student is expected to achieve.

In general, short-term objectives are not as specific as implementation plans which include specific student objectives at a task analysis level. It is important that objectives be measurable and that there be sequential steps leading to the attainment of the annual goal. It is also important to include within the goals and objectives any modifications or adaptations of procedures which may be needed to accommodate a handicapped student within a regular vocational education program. An informal review of the student's progress is required by special education policy every three months.

Vocational Alternatives for Handicapped Students

When interpreting vocational assessment data for handicapped students, school personnel should consider all vocational education options available in the school district. They also should be aware of employment available within the community or a reasonable geographic area, as students should be preparing for jobs that exist in the marketplace.

Federal special education and vocational education legislation, Public Laws 94-142 and 94-482, stress the placement of students in regular classes to the maximum extent possible. Some federal vocational funds are designated to be used for any excess costs involved in assisting a handicapped student to participate in regular vocational classes. In concurrence with these laws, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandates equal access and requires that the same vocational education opportunities available to regular students will be available to handicapped students.

Guidelines developed by the Office of Civil Rights state that criteria controlling student eligibility for admission to vocational education schools, facilities, and programs may not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, or handicap. School districts may not deny handicapped students access to vocational education programs or courses because of architectural or equipment barriers, or because of the need for related aids and services or auxiliary aids.

The student should be placed in the least restrictive environment appropriate to an individual's educational needs. Following are vocational options available, beginning with the least restrictive placement:

Regular Vocational Classes. Some handicapped students can succeed in regular vocational classes without support. These students typically will be handicapped students who are receiving non-instructional special education services, such as speech or related services.

Regular Vocational Classes With Support. A regular vocational class can be altered to accommodate special education students. This instruction should be provided to handicapped students who are otherwise assigned to resource rooms and who need adapted instruction. This support may include modification of instructional levels, modification of curriculum, extended time, specialized materials, adaptive equipment, aides, or other service to assist the student in a regular class. Excess costs incurred by providing this support may be covered by federal funds set aside for that purpose.

Coordinated Vocational-Academic Education (CVAE). The CVAE class is a more restrictive placement in that it is a separate class for certain populations. In addition to being handicapped, the student must be identified as either economically disadvantaged or academically disadvantaged.

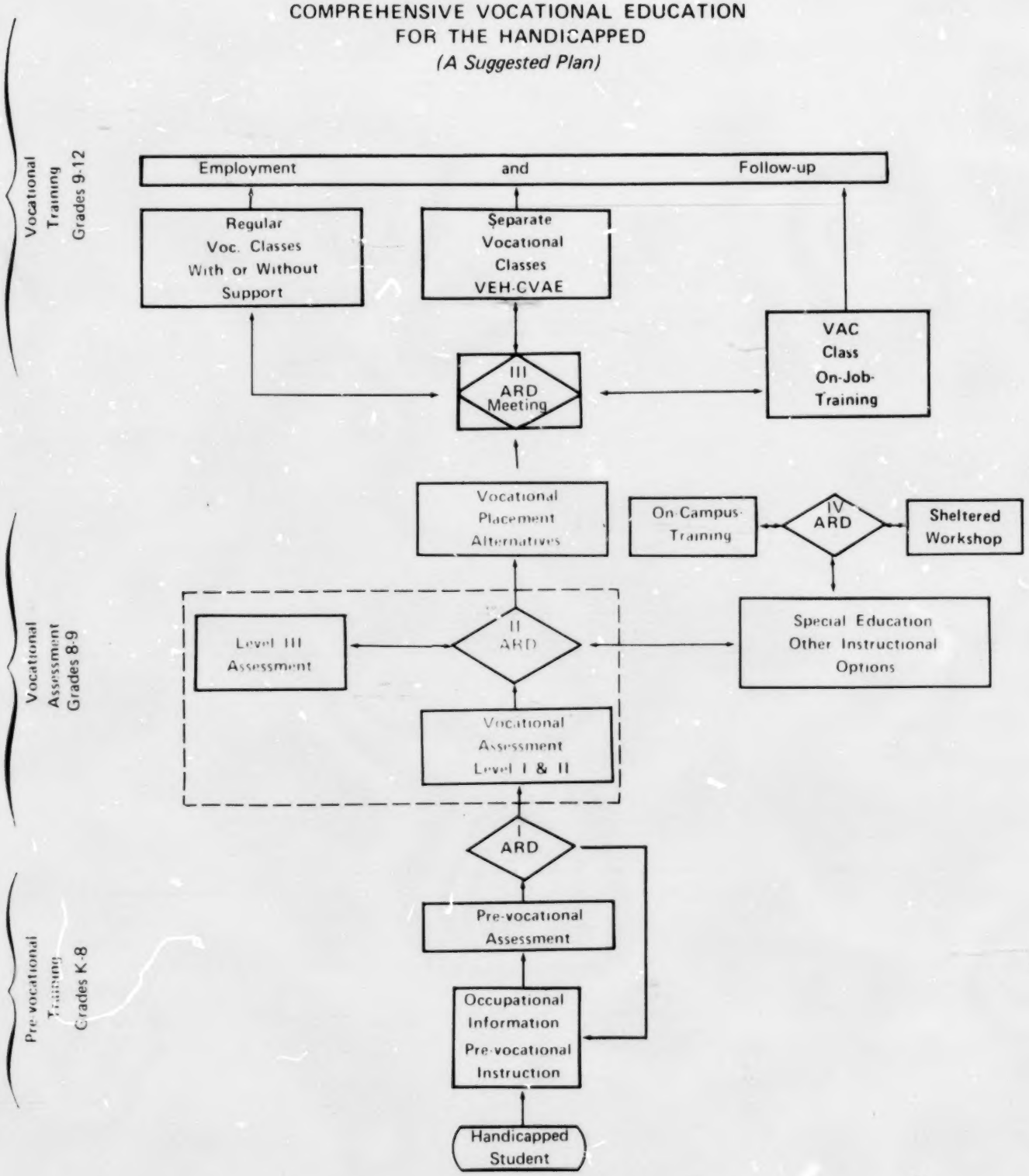
Vocational Education for the Handicapped (VEH). The VEH class is a vocational class designed for handicapped students whose greater degree of impairment precludes integration into a regular vocational education class. It is a more restrictive placement for the more severely handicapped who are in special education programs. Students are instructed with a specially designed curriculum.

Vocational Adjustment Class (VAC). The VAC class is a special education vocational alternative. It also is considered a restrictive placement because the students do not benefit from having regular students within their special class. Ideally, this program is not the total vocational training provided the student but should complement the skill training provided in a vocational education program. Handicapped students may be appropriately placed in VAC classes when it has been documented as the least restrictive placement for the individual.

Other Instructional Options as Approved by the Texas Education Agency. Current special education policies afford school districts the opportunity of developing other instructional options for handicapped students. In providing an array of secondary vocational education opportunities for handicapped students, options in addition to those described above are available if the need exists. These options may include on-campus and/or community-based work training activity centers, sheltered workshop activities, or other instruction/training arrangements.

COMPREHENSIVE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR THE HANDICAPPED

(A Suggested Plan)



Admission, Review, and Dismissal Committee In Vocational Planning Process

The ARD committee has several responsibilities during the provision of comprehensive vocational education service for the handicapped.

Vocational Planning Process—

All decisions as related to the individual education plan are made by the ARD committee. The decisions related to vocational assessment and program placement are an integral part of regularly scheduled ARD committee meetings. On the flow chart on page 9, the ARD decisions are coded and may be described as follows:

I ARD— During the annual review of the student's educational program, the ARD committee determines the progress of the student and/or recommends changes to the IEP. Typically, the decision for vocational assessment is made after reviewing recommendations of the student's teacher(s) in accordance with local district policy.

II ARD— This decision should be made after considering recommendations from the diagnostician and the vocational counselor or other locally identified vocational personnel. If sufficient information is available for placement, an ARD meeting with vocational representatives is convened. If additional vocational data is needed, a student is recommended for additional assessment in the Level III process according to local district policy.

III ARD— After all necessary vocational assessment data has been collected, the ARD committee meets to determine vocational program placement. The ARD committee includes vocational personnel for decision of appropriate vocational program placement including VAC class.

IV ARD— This is a decision for placement of students within a special education vocational placement. This decision may be made at the annual review for planning educational placement and does not specifically require vocational education participation.

Committee Structure for Vocational Placement—

When the committee reviews vocational assessment data to determine the appropriate vocational placement (III ARD Meeting), a vocational administrator or designee must be present on the committee. A counselor and teacher also may be present. The vocational membership may be changed at the discretion of the superintendent and/or vocational administrator but *must* include at least one member designated as the vocational administrator. When the ARD committee is developing the individual education plan (IEP), the vocational teacher who will instruct the student must be present. The committee will develop the goals and objectives for the student, and the vocational teacher will receive student information pertinent to instruction of that student.

Glossary

The **Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD)** committee is composed of individuals representing the areas of administration, instruction, and assessment (including at least one representative of special education), the parent or guardian, the designated education liaison, and the student when appropriate. When vocational placement is being considered, there will be additional membership including the vocational teacher who will instruct the student, the vocational administrator or his/her designee, and a counselor. The ARD committee has the responsibility of developing the individual education plan.

Career education includes experiences through which a person learns about careers. The intent is to make work, paid and unpaid, a meaningful part of an individual's total life style.

Career exploration is a portion of career education allowing a student to make a study of different occupations.

Handicapped describes a person who is mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically impaired, or other health impaired, or who has specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason of the above, requires special education and related services and cannot succeed in the regular vocational education program without special educational assistance or requires a modified vocational education program. (P.L. 94-482)

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) developed by the admission, review, and dismissal committee includes (a) a statement of the student's present competencies, (b) a statement of annual goals and short-term instructional objectives, (c) a statement of the specific educational services to provide for the student, including regular education, special education, and related services, (d) a statement of the amount of time to be spent in each setting and justification for the service, and (e) a statement of the schedules and criteria for evaluating each short-term objective.

Least restrictive environment is an educational placement determined individually for each handicapped student which is as close as possible to the regular class setting. The concept of least restrictive environment recognizes: (a) that handicapped students have a wide range of special education needs that vary greatly in intensity and duration; (b) that there is a recognized continuum of education settings which may, at a given time, be appropriate for an individual student's needs; (c) that to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped students should be educated with nonhandicapped students and (d) that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped students from education with nonhandicapped students should occur only when the intensity of the student's special education and related needs are such that they cannot be satisfied in an environment with nonhandicapped students, even when supplementary aids and services are provided or curriculum has been modified.

Occupational orientation is a vocational instructional guidance activity designed to prepare students to have a greater understanding of educational and vocational options and to assist them in making meaningful and informed occupational choices.

Pre-vocational instruction includes special education instruction to prepare handicapped students for entry into vocational training. This instruction covers several areas including personal and social skills, daily living skills, proper job attitudes, good work habits, and job readiness skills.

Related services are those developmental, corrective, or supportive services that may be required for an eligible handicapped student to benefit from special education instruction. Related services may include, but are not limited to, the provision of the following: physical therapy, occupational therapy, audiological services, medical diagnostic services, art therapy, music therapy, corrective therapy, psychological services, counseling services, orientation and mobility training, adaptive equipment and materials, health services, social work services, recreation therapy, speech therapy, and special transportation.

Special education is specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a handicapped child. This includes classroom instruction, instruction in physical education, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions. Special education includes speech pathology or any other related service if that service consists of specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a handicapped child, and is considered "special education" rather than a "related service" under state standards. Vocational education, if it consists of specially designed instruction at no cost to the parents to meet the unique needs of a handicapped child, is also considered to be "special education."

Special education cooperative is a joint effort by school districts of less than 3,000 average daily attendance (unless otherwise authorized by the Commissioner of Education) to serve handicapped students.

Supportive services is a term used in vocational education to refer to services similar to those provided by special education under "related services."

Vocational cooperative education is an organization of instruction designed to provide technical instruction, on-the-job training, and work experience. It involves a cooperative business relationship between employers of the community and the local education agency.

Vocational guidance/counseling provides assistance to students in their selection of career goals. Such counseling should take place prior to the student's involvement in vocational assessment and again after assessment activities have been completed.

Vocational education is organized educational programs that are directly related to the preparation of individuals for paid or unpaid employment or for additional preparation for a career requiring other than baccalaureate or advanced degree. The nine vocational areas identified by the U.S. Department of Education are agriculture, distributive education, health occupations education, occupational home economics, consumer and homemaking education, office occupations, technical education, trade and industrial occupations, and industrial arts.

Vocational instruction means instruction which is designed to prepare individuals for employment in a specific occupation or cluster of closely related occupations in an occupational field. Such instruction may include: (a) classroom instruction; (b) classroom related field, shop, and laboratory work; (c) programs providing occupational work experiences, including cooperative education and related instructional aspects of apprenticeship programs; (d) remedial programs which are designed to enable individuals to profit from instruction related to the occupation or occupations for which they are being trained by correcting whatever education deficiencies or handicaps prevent them from benefiting from such instruction; and (e) activities of vocational student organizations which are an integral part of the vocational instruction.

Work samples are tasks or activities that simulate a specific job and are used to assess skills, aptitudes, and abilities similar to those required in competitive employment situations. They can be obtained in three ways: (1) validated commercial work evaluation systems which can be purchased and which consist of work samples of varying degrees of complexity representing a large range of occupational areas; (2) samples that have been developed by rehabilitation centers; and (3) work samples which can be developed locally to supplement commercial systems.

COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; THE MODIFIED COURT ORDER, CIVIL ACTION 5281, FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, TYLER DIVISION

Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirements of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

(1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;

(2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a non-segregated basis,

(3) nondiscrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;

(4) nondiscriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;

(5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;

(6) nondiscriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and

(7) evidence of published procedures for hearing complaints and grievances.

In addition to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by a citizen or citizens residing in a school district where it is alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is found, the findings are reported to the Office for Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

TITLE VII, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11246 AND 11375; TITLE IX, 1973 EDUCATION AMENDMENTS; REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED; 1974 AMENDMENTS TO THE WAGE-HOUR LAW EXPANDING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1967; AND VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1972 AS AMENDED IN 1974.

It is the policy of the Texas Education Agency to comply fully with the nondiscrimination provisions of all federal and state laws and regulations by assuring that no person shall be excluded from consideration for recruitment, selection, appointment, training, promotion, retention, or any other personnel action, or be denied any benefits or participation in any programs or activities which it operates on the grounds of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, handicap, age, or veteran status (except where age, sex, or handicap constitute a bona fide occupational qualification necessary to proper and efficient administration). The Texas Education Agency makes positive efforts to employ and advance in employment all protected groups.